

E 458

"

C 11



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 026 241 5



Hollinger
pH 8.5
Mill Run F3-1955

E 458

.1

.C11

Copy 1

LETTER

TO THE

Dup

GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS,

ON OCCASION OF HIS LATE PROCLAMATION,

By J. B. Curtis Secy

OF AUGUST 20, 1861.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY A. K. LORING,

319 WASHINGTON STREET.

1861.

LETTER

TO THE

GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS,

ON OCCASION OF HIS LATE PROCLAMATION,

OF AUGUST 20, 1861.

James Elliot Cabot

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY A. K. LORING,

319 WASHINGTON STREET.

1861.

E 458
.1
.C11

Gift

Bos. Pub. Lib.

14 Jan '06

Ms. C. 2. 1. 12

LETTER.

SIR :

ALL good citizens of Massachusetts must feel themselves bound, as well by personal respect as by that due to your office, to give ready heed to the exhortations addressed to them in your late Proclamation. The occasion is indeed pressing, and the ancient virtue of the Commonwealth neither dead nor asleep. If, nevertheless, the response shall seem to your justly excited feelings,—if not tardy and hesitating, at least less prompt and full, and their devotion to the country's cause less entire and unhesitating, than an adequate sense of what is involved in this struggle should at once enforce,—be assured, sir, that the surprise and the disappointment are shared by those whom you addressed.

Massachusetts, following the example set by her Chief Magistrate, has done and, doubtless, is doing much. Many motives call upon us to act,—and,

first of all, a new and potent enthusiasm has been awakened, and many persons who were neither brutish nor revolutionary, but good neighbors and respecters of the laws, have learned for the first time what the word patriotism means, and have discovered with some astonishment that they also have a country. They would gladly give their feelings expression, but, coming to act, their enthusiasm receives a chill. The zeal is not less, but it is at a loss for direction, and paralyzed by doubt. What sacrifice could be too great when, were failure conceivable, nothing less than the national existence is at stake? It is not merely tranquillity and prosperity that are endangered,—for if the slave power is to rule, to what end have we existed here these two hundred years? The magnitude of the issue may not be clearly seen, but it is deeply felt; and, slowly or swiftly, would show itself in corresponding action.

Whence, then, this sluggishness,—these mixed motives,—these unhandsome considerations? It is not the hanging back of weak nerves or of a callous selfishness, scared at the proportions of the contest or the sacrifices demanded. Those whom this embarrassment afflicts are the best citizens, the whole-souled, the unwavering. They are cordially ready to do and to suffer for the right; but, when they come to act, they find themselves hesitating, and as it were, spell-bound by apprehension and distrust.

It is not that there is any real suspicion of evil intentions or of the lack of good intentions on the part of those at the head of affairs. But good intentions are cheap. Who cares how good a man's intentions are, if he be unenlightened, weakly good-natured, jesuitical, using questionable means for the sake of the end? His good intentions may as likely lead to evil, as bad intentions. It is not any definite suspicion, but an uneasy misgiving, that the national administration is not even yet alive to the true nature and extent of the work before them. It is in vain that the people act, if they and their agents are not at one, at least as to principles. It is not mere disgust, provoked by all manner of scandals in every department of administration, by inefficiency and by misefficiency of performance. It was to be expected, that on sudden occasion, the machinery would be found rusty and out of repair. That the offices should be filled with creatures whose only function is to grasp and devour, — with enemies of the country, — with gallows-birds, even, — that was to be expected as the natural consequence of long prosperity. The machine was little needed, and the use of it accordingly slight and careless, affording no test of its condition. Its rickety plight, if known or suspected, was not without its consolations. We had learned to ignore it or to tolerate it, for the sake of the freedom that rendered it possible. But, if the disease, not stopping at the

surface, is to strike in and become the system,—if clamorous partisanship is to be the title to office, and party tactics the rule of government, and this as of right and not by accidental abuse,—dissolution is clearly at hand. Jobbery, on whatever scale or upon however magnanimous principles, is jobbery still; and though a great and thriving country can endure a great deal of jobbing, yet a government *all* job, is possible only when the need of government has ceased altogether,—a consummation, unhappily, not yet attained, and indeed, as this occasion abundantly shows, still far off.

Of course, no considerate person will incline to censoriousness at this moment, but rather to abate and postpone much of just demands. It is not a favorable time to careen the ship of state. If the leaks be not too threatening, and the accumulation of seaweed and barnacles do not stop her way altogether,—if she will still mind the helm, and above all if the helmsman do not in the stress of the moment forget to look at his compass,—the ship's company may well be content to receive orders without criticism. Just now, the need doubtless sharpens our sense of deficiencies. Let us not obstruct by way of helping. Let us not visit upon these men the fault of their predecessors, or of their position, if only they make the best of their position. Faults of detail, blunders in execution, we shall mend of, if the aim

be thoroughly and heartily right. We will not demand of our functionaries an impossible virtue, skill, or accomplishment, — much less than that. But this at least they owe us, that what they attempt shall be *in the direction* of what the nation demands, and not in its aim or its means to go to vitiate and obstruct what it has at heart. This, at least, can be required of every organized body, political or other, that it shall stand up for itself. It is a test equally applicable whatever be our opinion of its merits. Every sound organism, whether beneficent or malignant, is at least coherent, — wanting that one sees not what can save it.

But the history of the present national administration shows not so much a want of skill or want of success, as want of purpose. Mixed motives, deference to this or that interest or clique, subtle considerations of remote effects, — whatever our opinions may be, it is clear no success can be had in this way. It is beyond human wisdom to compute by the counting of votes or the consultations of wire-pullers, even the nearest effects of any course of action. The number of possible combinations, the sidewinds of new influences, of after events, at once outrun the wariest and most practiced judgment.

Do your duty, whatever come of it; — one hesitates to reiterate so trite a maxim, — yet it is the sum of political wisdom as of all other wisdom, and not

alone a rule of morals, but the degree that it receives application in a state, as shown in the pertinacity with which rulers and people stand up for their organic, distinctive principle, — is the measure of its political efficiency. It may be rude, unreasoning, barbarous ; — it may be accompanied by all manner of surface abuses, of chicanery and injustice, but it shows the warrant of a deep necessity in a steady drift in one direction, that amid all superficial contradictions gives simplicity and character to its policy.

With us it seems sometimes as if the virtues of our politicians were as alarming as their vices. When justice comes to mean — not all the plunder for our side, but a fair share for the other side ; — when right is held to be a tender and chivalrous consideration of opposing wrong ; — one would rather see somewhat less of this civility, and try what savage instinct might effect. Such tolerance is incredible, not compatible with human proportions. Let us rather have a little intolerance — or rather, a perception that principles are absolute, and not a matter for toleration at all.

What is the “organic principle” of the Republican party ? What is it amid the heterogenous elements wherefrom it was built, that each member of it acknowledged as his ? Surely, every candid person, whether he voted with that party or not, will agree that its distinctive tenet, and accordingly the policy from which it could in no event depart, was opposi-

tion to the extension of Slavery within the national territory. Its course, if not indeed like a Roman road straight over hill and dale to that mark, should at least be expected to keep the main direction, with only such deviations, if any, as should be plainly necessary to avoid worse. But what shall we say, when the chosen agents of that party propose to do what no enemy of it ever threatened, viz: — to make the government itself a slaveholder? Mr. Secretary Cameron's late manifesto already goes to that length and further. For by it the United States would not only hold slaves, but adjudge them to itself, and that not only without judge or jury, but by a most summary process, wherein the ancient maxim of the common law — (is it not the most ancient and the most fundamental?) — that the law always favors liberty — would be reversed, and every person (of a certain complexion) held to be a slave until the contrary is proved.

These dark complexioned stragglers are not prisoners-of-war, for the government makes none. Whether or not they are "fugitives from service," must remain utterly unknown to it or its military officials, until the fact be duly authenticated to them, as it never can be by them. And if they were, that would confer no right upon the United States to hold them. "Local masters," whether loyal or disloyal, have no common-law rights over these fugitives —

much less any such equitable claims as to have effect given them by the mere motion and certain knowledge residing in the breasts of the various commanders of United States troops. These mild phrases of "receiving" and "employing" such presumed fugitives, mean, then, in fact, a reënslaving them by the United States. A function of the government hitherto unsuspected! Truly, it was a trivial matter in respect of which the country was so convulsed,—the menaced introduction of slavery into the remote deserts of the West, in comparison with this extension of it into the bosom of the government itself! Our War Secretary would thus seem to promise well as a minister of peace; at least, if offering the enemy a good deal more than they ever asked would bring that about. If the dreadful "abolition" administration is thus to legitimate and itself practice what its extremest opponents only claimed toleration for,—it does not appear what remains to fight about, at any rate from the side of the slaveholders.

But, however it might content *them*, such a peace as this would have few attractions for Massachusetts. Peace is highly valued by us, because it does not mean the absence of war, but is a comprehensive expression for all the blessings that follow an advancing civilization. Peace to us means concord, the brotherhood of mankind,—not license to flog our nigger and parade our bowie-knife with impunity. Peace plus slavery would be to us rather an empty affair.

It is for this, sir, if we hesitate and hang back. It is for this that the performance of Massachusetts, whatever it be, is not yet adequate to her means and her good-will. We value peace so highly that we are willing to pay a high price for it — even war. It is because the people know well what war involves, that they will be found punctually and religiously ready to meet it on due occasion.

Only let it be assured that what we are to buy with these grievous devastations, with the sacred tears of wives and mothers, is to be peace indeed, and not a mockery, — a peace that means freedom and not a peace that means slavery. It is time that the true issues of this contest were clearly put. Let the cant about the “Union” cease. If the Union means anything, it means consent in principles, it means a common standard of right and of civilization — not a common custom-house and post-office, nor a league of fillibusters to keep the rest of the world away from their plunder. If that be the image of the country, it is the vainest folly to exhort men to patriotism, to adventure life and fortune in its cause; for their only concern with it can be but to avoid danger to life and property. They may take a little risk or loss to avoid a greater; but for enthusiasm, as well get enthusiastic over an insurance-policy.

What, then, is the shield that the Massachusetts mother is to put into the hand of her son, when with

bitter anguish she yields him to the call of his country — “with it my son or upon it?” What is it, that he should die rather than surrender? Is it some new compromise? Is it the Fugitive Slave Law in a new and enlarged draft? Is it the divine right of barbarism and oppression? A great deal of fog hangs over the national councils, and what is seen from time to time is sometimes alarmingly ambiguous. How, then, can it look for a prompt and hearty support? In the smoke and din of battle much must remain obscured, much must be taken for granted,—but when the face of the leader is discerned, it should discover and inspire an unwavering purpose, and a trust placed beyond the reach of failure.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 026 241 5

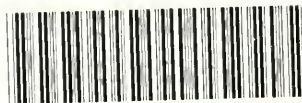
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 026 24

Hollinger
pH 8.5
Mill Run F3-1955

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 026 241 5



Hollinger
pH 8.5
Mill Run F3-1955